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A
SOLEMN APPEAL
TO THE
UNDERSTANDING
OF
CHRISTIANS.

PRICE ONE SHILLING AND SIX PENCE.

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TO THE

UNDERSTANDING



CHRISTIAN

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A
SOLEMN APPEAL
TO THE
UNDERSTANDING
OF
CHRISTIANS;
IN FAVOUR OF
REVEALED RELIGION.

BY
JAMES ^KLOW. A. M.
MINISTER *of the* SCOTCH-CHURCH
at ROTTERDAM.

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SOLEMN APPEAL

UNDERSTANDING

CHRISTIAN

REVENUE



JAMES LOW A.M.

Minister of the Southern Church
at Rotterdam

ROTTTERDAM

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1800

THE following Appeal, in favour of Revealed Religion, appears without any apology for its publication. The Author has none to offer. Its intrusion upon the public is voluntary ; though , by no means , with indifference to the general sentiment or reception it may meet with. Whatever its fate in this latter respect may prove —

he can candidly own, he was neither impelled thereto by necessity, nor actuated by temerity.

HIS zeal for the great interests of Revealed Religion in the world, — in days when it is so evidently upon the decline — his desire to be as extensively useful as he possibly could — dictated the wish to contribute his *mite* to what he conceives to be the real good and felicity of Mankind.

IF it holds true that those, accustomed to a mode of instruction, are most likely to profit by a con-
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tinuance of it ; he has reason to believe the following pages will be acceptable to many , among whom Providence had appointed his younger years to be spent ; * as well as to those to whom they were primarily addressed. —

HE has only to add that the present publication shall be continued , with several discourses , according as the Publisher may meet with encouragement. —

IN

* Alluding to the Churches at FLUSHING and at MIDDLEBURGH — of which the Author was Minister: — of the former above thirteen years — of the latter about fourteen months only.

IN how far the present attempt merits a favourable reception, it is not for him to say. He commits it implicitly into the hands of that GOD who from *little things* is able to beget GREAT EVENTS — and out of *weakness* to produce STRENGTH. —

Rotterdam. 6th of March

1799.

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*

in general, and the Gospel Covenant, in particular, — it may be suggested — “standeth with them entire, in evidence of this they may have been lately at the Table of their Lord and commended his dying love, in all the time.”

I. JOHN IV. 1.

Beloved, believe not every Spirit, but try the Spirits, whether they are of God: because many false Prophets are gone out into the World.

ON the reading of these words, I doubt not, but in their first aspect, they will be considered, by not a few, to lead to meditation, in regard, at least, of them unnecessary. “The foundation of God”, the persuaded belief of Revealed Religion,

in general, and the Gospel Covenant, in particular, — it may be suggested — “standeth with them sure.” In evidence of this they may plead having been lately at the Table of their LORD and commemorated his dying love, in all the interesting views of the sacred Institution. In the progress of the spiritual exercise, it may be urged, they proceeded upon principles of integrity and embraced the Divine Ordinance as a salutary medium for the conveyance of that Grace, they believe to be essential to their perseverance in their holy profession.

BUT to give efficacy to such insinuations, the Counsel in the text, if not directly, may effectually to every good purpose tend indirectly.

THE general tendency of it is to arm Mankind, with that caution and reserve, necessary to the defence of the

the Truth as it is in CHRIST JESUS. And certain it is, to give stability to our Holy Faith and, hence, to every resolution flowing therefrom, every argument, in favour of its veracity, is wanting.

IN proportion to the measure of knowledge and conviction we have acquired here, we shall be actuated towards it with a greater or lesser zeal and feel concerned for its interests in the world. It is *then*, when sufficiently informed respecting the Doctrines of CHRIST, we are prepared to enter upon the exercises of his Religion, in a rational manner; and, in the spirit of it, to supplicate that all powerful Blessing and Grace, that only can lead us to that "full assurance of Faith", of which the Apostle speaks.*

RE.

* Hebr. X. 22.

RELIGION, in general, has no greater enemy than Ignorance. Hence, I may safely say, proceeds an essential cause of error and infidelity — a known source of unaccountable prejudices, of which the human mind seems most susceptible, is most governed by and, of which, having gained possession, for any length of time, it, seldom at least, without the greatest difficulty, can get entirely rid. Hence, men are so easily “spoiled through philosophy and vain deceit, after the traditions of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after CHRIST”. *

THESE few, but obvious remarks, will I trust justify the selection of the Apostle's exhortation, in the text, for our present meditation. — The fact is, it will be found of universal concern.

* Col. II. 8.

cernment. It removes the scruples of those who may plead having been at the Table of their LORD — by holding up to them, a pathetic warning against receding or being misled from those doctrines we have sanctioned our belief of there; while, herein, it must ultimately tend to our security in our Holy Faith. — With respect, again, to those of us, who, hitherto, may not have waited upon the august Institution, through mistaken notions of it, through unmeaning prejudice or unaccountable neglect of the duties of Religion, it conveys an affectionate call to study the Truth — to try its reasonableness and necessity — to enquire, with becoming earnestness, whether it be of GOD — to search and distinguish the illusions of sophistry, the false suggestions of corrupt reason, and imposture of pretended prophecies and to embrace

the "form of sound words," CHRIST, who came from GOD, has left us, equally in theoretical confession and in practice. — To all of us it proclaims — "Beloved, believe not every Spirit, but try the Spirits, whether they be of GOD; because many false prophets are gone out into the World." —

IN the days of the Apostles, you mark, false prophets were not wanting. — St. Paul warned the Colossians against being "Spoilt through the deceitfulness of Philosophy," which he foresaw might mislead weak minds and deprive them of their faith, without supplying them with any thing solid in the place of it.

INDEED, from the earliest days of Christianity, it has met with opposers — with those, who have corrupted it, "with

“with vain deceit,” or the plausible appearance of false philosophy. —

SUCH has been its fate, in every succeeding age to the present day! — Such — alas! — we must own, is, peculiarly, the reception our boasted days of superior philosophical illumination afford it.

WITH us, not a few, but “many” false prophets are gone out into the “world.” In one shape or another, the first and fundamental Truths have been and are daily attacked. With some, it would appear to be their professed aim to undermine all Religion, on the specious pretence of its contradicting natural reason: — with others, to corrupt, to fashion and model it to private fancy: — with a still greater part, to introduce general doubting: — while, with the still larger multitude,

from the disputes and, hence, various sects that have arisen, in religion, all rational enquiry is superseded and a settled indifference is seen to take place. —

It is only, now and then, such singular phenomena are seen on the stage of the world, as a pretence to Divine Inspiration and extraordinary selection to make known the extraordinary mind of the Deity and reveal the secrets of futurity. Such attempts are always attended with great difficulty; and, in an age of prevailing infidelity, are little, perhaps, to be dreaded in their consequences. However dangerous and natural it is to fall into extremes, this is an extreme men have no great bias to run into. And yet, in our age of so much incredulity and pretended doubting, we have, a few years ago, witnessed such an extreme resorted to, in

in a neighbouring Kingdom, in the prophecies of a *Richard Brothers*, even published to the World, and claiming, in the name of the Deity, universal belief. —

BETWEEN such extremes the minds of not a few are greatly agitated and unsettled; and, from their weakness, are, often, fatally misled. — For want of becoming enquiry, they suffer themselves easily to be imposed upon and embrace sophistry for right reason. —

AFTER all, that, in the grand subject of Religion, some certainty is acquirable no one, in reason, can deny. Truths are and must be such, in themselves, previous to our investigation. — Universal Scepticism is an insult upon the reason and senses of mankind. The very hypothesis destroys itself. For, if nothing is certain, how can we acquire

certainty of that very proposition? —
 Is it not clear that, if such certainty is
 acquirable, by the same progress of ar-
 gument, we can arrive at the knowledge
 of other Truths? —

INDEED, there are principles, uni-
 versally true — which must be admit-
 ted — which, as so many axioms, are
 the medium to the investigation and dis-
 covery of others. True reason and the
 true knowledge of nature — which are
 true philosophy — convince our judg-
 ment of these common Truths, and
 lead, on persuasion, to the fixed belief
 of many others. —

ALLOWING, now, with respect to
 Revealed religion, there may be and,
 undoubtedly, are, several points, which
 exceed the powers of the human mind
 to comprehend; yet may it arrive at
 conviction that these very points —
 ge-

generally the most disputed; — do not contradict, though they surpass reason; nay, that faith in them, in virtue of the antecedent evidence of that volume, which contains them, being of Divine origin, is reasonable and fit; — since it must be acknowledged to be a necessary hypothesis that an extraordinary Revelation of the Divine Mind, should make known some Truths, man, of himself, with his finite capacities, was unable to discover and, herein, correct that deficiency in knowledge, unaided reason has never appeared charged with, with respect to the acquisition of true felicity. —

AND, surely, in all controverted points, — especially, in regard of Religion, a right of judgment for ourselves is indisputable. — We are not — we ought not — to be rash in receiving the private sentiment of any individual.

dividual , of however great renown for mental abilities , when found to militate against the Truths of G O D . It is our duty to guard against that “ lack “ of knowledge ,” which , of old , was complained of , as being the true cause of many erring . — We have a Christian Liberty , to which we are called , and that is “ to try the Spirits , whether “ they be of G O D : — because many “ false prophets are gone out into the “ world.” —

How great need there is to know and exercise this Christian Liberty , in our days , what has , hitherto , been hinted abundantly indicates . —

I wish therefore — O Christian ! — by a solemn appeal to thy understanding , to improve upon thy insinuations , alluded to in the entrance on this discourse , with respect to thy having been

been at the Saviour's Table, by invigorating the great Truths thou hast sanctioned thy belief of there — thus securing thee against being misled “through the vain deceit of Philosophy” — “not to believe every Spirit” that may attempt imposing upon thy credulity and making thee an associate in corrupting and transforming the beautiful fabric of the Christian faith. —

AND — in attempting this great end — you will feel a generous aim is intended to bring the superficially thinking and irreligious, if possible, to that reflection and thought, antecedent to their effectual purpose of return from the error of their ways. —

Now, to proceed, with some order, I shall begin in the

FIRST.

FIRST-PLACE — with forewarning
 you of the necessity of the coun-
 sel, tendered in the text, arising
 from the many attempts that have
 been made by designing men to
 impose upon the World: “Many
 false Prophets,” says the Apos-
 tle, “are gone out into the
 World.” —

SECONDLY, I shall consider the ge-
 neral duty recommended — namely
 “to try the Spirits, whether they
 be of God:” — And, then,
 in the

THIRD-PLACE — I shall subjoin a
 few practical reflections on the whole.

I begin, in the

FIRST-PLACE, with forewarning
 you, of the necessity of the coun-
 sel,

sel, tendered in the text, arising from the many attempts that have been made by designing men to impose upon the World. — “Many “false Prophets” — says the Apostle — “are gone out into the “World.” —

Now, to be convinced of this, let us inspect sacred History — where we shall find repeated warnings, on the part of the Deity, to be on our guard against deceivers — nay, instances of false prophets recorded. —

EVEN prophane history with-holds not its testimony here.

LET us hear the Divine Testimony, so early as the days of the Children of Israel, before their possession of the promised land. In the XIIIth Ch. of Deuteronomy, God, expressly, cautions them,

them, by his Prophet, against false teachers, who should delude them into the guilt of idolatry and requires them to punish all such, how near so ever they might stand related to Israel, with death.

WE read (II Tim. III. 8) of a "Jannes and Jambres, who withstood "Moses:" — Who pretended to oppose the clear credentials that true Prophet discovered of his mission from the true GOD, by sorcery and the aid of Devils attempting to perform the like miracles he did, in the presence of Pharaoh.

OF Balaam, it is recorded, notwithstanding his pretences to Divine Revelation, he resorted to enchantments and was a man of a mean, mercenary, disposition. Numb. Ch. XXII. XXIII. XXIV. 1.

OF

OF the Prophets of Baal, whose number was four hundred and fifty, we are informed they were brought to a shameful silence by Elijah the true Prophet of the living G o d. I. Kings. XVIII. 22. —

So, again, we hear a Zedekiah withstanding the true Prophet Micaiah and persuading Ahab to go to Ramoth-Gilead; where, according to the prediction of Micaiah, he is slain. I. Kings. XXII.

OF Manasseh, we read, he reared up altars to Baal, observed times, and used enchantments and dealt with familiar Spirits. II. Kings. XXI. 1—6.

Thus, also, in the days of Isaiah, great complaint is made of Israel suffering themselves to be misled by “astrologers, star-gazers, monthly-
B “ prog.

“ prognosticators — sorcerers” and such like impostors. Is. XLVII. 12. 13. In those of Jeremiah, we read of lying prophets persuading Zedekiah and his people that they should not fall into the hands of the Chaldeans ; by which delusion their ruin was accomplished. Jer. XXXVIII. 19. And it is well known of Nebuchadnezzar that he resorted first to his “ magicians, “ astrologers, sorcerers &c.” — to have his dream explained. Dan. II. 2. —

IN the New Testament, the same complaint of impostors is heard. With the clearer discoveries of the Gospel — in its first state — even clouds of obscurity appeared gathering to suppress the cheering light. Even, then, it was foretold, “ Many false Prophets shall “ arise and shall deceive many.” It was said, “ there should arise false “ Christs and false Prophets, who “ should shew great signs and wonders, “ in

“insomuch, that, if it were possible,
“they should deceive the very elect.”

Matth. XXIV. 11. 24. —

ACCORDINGLY — when further advanced in its maturity, — when those great doctrines of salvation, founded on the resurrection of the revealed Messiah and Redeemer, were better understood and more fully preached — the most essential of these were attacked; and a mixture attempted to be introduced foreign to the true spirit of Christianity.

JUSTIFICATION, for instance, partly by the deeds of the Law and partly by Faith, was early broached and found a warm antagonist in the Apostle Paul in his Epistles to the Romans and Galatians. — So, of others, we read, “they turned the grace of Christ into

“lasciviousness,” * insinuating as much as

* Jude vs. 4.

“ that we should continue in sin that
 “ grace might abound”. * Of all such
 perverters of the Truth, St. Peter
 says, “ they were illiterate and unsta-
 “ ble men, who wrested Scripture to
 “ their own destruction.” † —

WE are, particularly, told of a Hy-
 meneus and Philetus who taught the
 resurrection was past and overthrew the
 faith of some. II. Tim. II. 17. In a
 word, through the whole of the Apostolic
 writings, warning is interspersed against
 the corrupters of the Faith — against
 those, especially, who, under a speci-
 ous pretext of extraordinary knowledge,
 — of feigned sanctity, and piety *in*
words, of extraordinary righteousness *in*
superstitious worship — of a warm
 zeal, tinged, however, *with pride*
and

* Rom. VI. 1.

† II. Pet. III. 16.

and severity — of affected humility — yet “puffed up with their fleshly mind,” erred widely from the Truth as it is in Christ. — And, hence, many of these, from their pretended knowledge, distinguished themselves, in after times, by the name of Gnostics. — the impure practices and base principles of which sect few can be ignorant of.

PASSING over the many impostures, the Pagan history supplies us with ; — even among the Romans and Grecians, the more intelligent part of the Heathen World ; — the more so, since these, in our days, are generally known and universally repobated ; the history of the Church lays before us numerous instances of the grossest impositions on the reason and faith of Mankind.

I need not remind you of the history of Mahomet in Arabia ; and specify the

origin and progress of his imposture. In the Church of Rome, in the absurd stories and pretended miracles, countenanced there, we witness so many deviations from the Truth, that, in these respects, at least, must justify the character of false prophets.

NAY, after the Reformation, on its first appearance, how many obstacles were thrown in its way to retard its progress! —

I must refer you to the history of the Church, to hear what wild tenets and strange doctrines were broached and maintained by the various sects, still uniting under the common name of Protestants, in league against the errors of the Church of Rome. —

I shall only further add, in general, that he must be a stranger in our

Israel, who knows not that, through
 “the vain deceit of philosophy,” Chris-
 tianity has been undermined — in its
 first Truths being denied and impiously
 traduced: that, for instance, the
 doctrine of the Trinity, the Divinity
 of our Blessed LORD and of the
 HOLY GHOST, have been rejected;
 of course all those doctrines of salva-
 tion, founded on their veracity have
 been weakened and destroyed — nay,
 that at this day, such is the melancholy
 case among us,

So true, then, is the remark I made,
 in the entrance on this discourse, — in
 the days of the Apostles, false prophets
 were not wanting. —

From what has been hinted, it appears
 they have existed, and, indeed, will
 ever continue as long as there is a militant
 Church here below. For wise ends, we

must conclude, from the wisdom of the Deity, such is permitted. —

THE force, now, of the Apostolic warning namely, “that many false prophets are gone out into the world,” is evident. For since this is so manifestly the case, what great need we have to be on our guard against deception! As exceeding precious and interesting as the Truth is above falsehood, — especially in Religious matters, in things belonging to our eternal peace of mind; as exceeding great must our circumspection be not to be misled from it. —

WHAT, then, to be done? — How distinguish between false and true Prophets, or Teachers of Religion, as the term here may fitly be understood? Why, says the Apostle, —

I. “BE.

"BELIEVE not every Spirit." His obvious meaning is — Believe not every person, who may pretend to inspiration or to be sent a Teacher from God. Guard steadily against forwardness and over-credulousness in receiving for Divine Truths, what men may be ready to impose upon you as the subject of immediate personal revelation from Heaven. Guard equally against all novelties that militate against the Truth as it is in CHRIST JESUS. — Your great concern is
 "To try the Spirits:" — that is to search into the validity of every pretence to Inspiration and examine the credentials of all who shall attempt to propagate any doctrine for Divine, or to invalidate the force and truth of those doctrines, already established as being of undoubted Divine origin.

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THIS,

THIS, now, my Brethren, is the general duty recommended by the Apostle, which I proposed and shall proceed to consider in the

SECOND PLACE. —

IT is necessary to premise that, agreeably to what has been said, pretences to Divine Revelation may be made : — that, therefore, we ought not “to believe every Spirit” — which, indeed, would be acting a most unsafe and unreasonable part ; since, thereby, we should be led into all the inconsistencies men might broach and propagate. Yet can such an inference — equally of Reason and Revelation — never be interpreted, in justice, to favour general doubting. — Because we are not to believe every spirit, is no argument we are to believe none. — Because there may be and are impostors, is no good evidence

THAT

2 B

there

there are no genuine assertors of Inspiration from God. The text implies in it there are such. When it prohibits general belief, it confines to the full acquiescence in what is certain — true — “of God.”

HEREIN lies our Christian Liberty to distinguish between what is true and what is not true. For this investigation God has endued us with powers. For this very end he has made us reasonable creatures. For this he has provided us with a Revelation of his Will; — which that it is, indeed, Divine, he has supplied us with evidences, sufficient to command the implicit faith of every intelligent, impartial and reasonable enquirer. —

THE possibility of a true Divine Revelation is what no man, who has any just conceptions of the power of

God

GOD and of the nature of man, in his present imperfect state, can deny. And that we do, actually, possess such a Divine Revelation, in the writings of the Old and New Testament, we have every evidence the nature of the thing will admit of. These evidences we are bound, individually, to try. They have been repeatedly tried and represented, in their various striking convincing light, by many good and learned men and they have been found to be unanswerably true — “to be given by inspiration of GOD.” —

It is not to be expected, I should here enter upon a demonstration of this great Truth; and, I the rather take it for granted, considering I am speaking to those, who, by profession at least, acknowledge the sacred writings to be of GOD — of course, to be the universal rule of Faith and Practice. —

I N-

INDEED, in tracing this general Truth, — which necessarily implies in it a particular examination of those doctrines revealed and the credentials they offer for their veracity, much close attention of mind and strict scrutiny is requisite. —

WITH respect to the Gospel-History, we shall discover every evidence that can be deemed wanting to command our Faith. But, therein, also, we shall meet with mysteries, which the very meaning of the word suggests, we are unable fully to comprehend; which we cannot thus fully explain; yet concerning which, we are, by no means, to be negligent. — Of this nature are the great Doctrines of the Trinity — of the union of the Divine with the Human Nature in the Person of the Mediator. These, in their magnitude, surpass our powers of comprehension.

Are

Are they, therefore, to be dismissed for untruths? No: these we are "to try."

BUT how try? — Not, by attempting to reduce them to the standard of Reason — which is impossible, — but by enquiring whether the Infinite God (who, doubtless, may and can make known Truths, the nature — the manner — the *how* of which remain unsearchable, by finite creatures) has revealed such Truths in his Word and prescribed them as objects of our Faith.

It must strike you, my Brethren, that if, notwithstanding the many evidences in favour of a Divine Revelation, we are to reject whatever is inconceivable by Reason, all distinction between Reason and Faith is destroyed. — In this case, we should become Natural Philosophers and forfeit every title

title to being Christian Believers. —
 But, I feel, if I were to pursue this
 argument, I should be, insensibly, led
 on to prove the insufficiency of natural
 Reason, or the light of Nature, to our
 happiness, and, hence, to urge the
 necessity of a Divine Revelation; —
 the proper end of which is to make
 known such Truths, of which we can
 form no natural idea, nor have any
 natural evidence, and the which, I be-
 fore said, I should at present take
 for granted to be found in the writ-
 ings of the Old and New Testament. —

BUT, even, when the Divinity of
 Revelation is admitted, the duty before
 us, namely “to try the Spirits, whe-
 “ther they be of G O D,” seems only
 to begin. All those warnings, tendered
 in Scripture, against false prophets and
 teachers, with the many exhortations
 to rational enquiry into the Truth,
 pro-

proceed, on the supposition, that the Truth is revealed and is to be found, in that very book, which contains such warnings and exhortations. —

THE disputes about various doctrinal points are, no doubt, great; and have formed the various sects and divisions now seen to prevail. And yet, the obscurities that have given rise to different conceptions are neither so great in the doctrines themselves, nor are they material. — They derive a formidable aspect from the corruption of the mind, perverting them to speak private favourite party opinions. The great fundamental Truths of Religion, are revealed with a sufficient simplicity and plainness, and, with respect to mere speculative points, they affect not “the foundation of GOD that standeth sure.” —

NEI-

NEITHER can these various conceptions and sectaries be supposed to prove any good argument for obscurity in revealed Truths, any more, than that any science should suffer from the most intelligent and acute men having been found differing and disputing about it. — These, indeed, prove the weakness of the human mind; and direct us to express more our surprise they should not take place than that they actually do.

FOR, seriously to reflect on the different complexions of the human character and the various principles by which men are actuated, — to consider the prevailing influence of popular errors and prejudices, — to reflect on the numbers “spoilt” — led astray “by the vain “deceit of false philosophy” — must prove to us the impossibility of a Revelation, adapted to so many opposite wishes and desires; and lead us, naturally

rally to infer the easy transition to modelling and disfiguring that one true Divine Revelation, they cannot deny, to their own fond prejudices and prevailing inclinations. —

BESIDES, it is impossible to say, to what lengths, into what absurdities, a spirit of pride and inordinate self love may lead some men. And hence arise so many errors. Hence, too, the necessity of “trying such spirits, whether they are of God:” Hence, again, the difficulty in trying and distinguishing Truth from falsehood. —

BUT, after all, the Truth is discernible. The exhortation to “try the Spirits” supposes there is some rule we are to proceed by and a certainty of acquiring our desired end.

THE

THE query, then, will turn — What is this sure rule?

IT must be either REASON or REVELATION, OR BOTH CONJUNCTLY. —

NOW, Reason, viewed as being our understanding, whereby we are so greatly distinguished from the other parts of Creation, whereby we are rational Creatures, is, unquestionably, the means for trying and distinguishing Truth from falsehood. But then, what before was observed, must carefully be remembered here, I mean — that Human Reason, in its most improved state, is finite. It cannot penetrate, unaided, into many Truths, essential to be known to our felicity. Hence, I repeat it, the necessity of a Divine Revelation to make known these Truths and propose them as the objects of our Faith. —

THESE, now, being proposed to our understanding, we are to “try whether “they are of GOD,” — in the sense already pointed out, — whether GOD has, indeed, revealed them.

WERE we to refuse assent to whatever comes not within the reach of human comprehension, we should be involved into the greatest uncertainty and doubt, with regard to many things, in the Kingdom of Nature, which we cannot comprehend, but which we cannot deny. — And this very consideration strongly pleads for a like deference to those great Truths the Infinite GOD has made known.

THE query here returns — Has GOD made known these Truths? — In this case, they become objects not of natural evidence but of very reasonable faith; because proceeding from the testimony
of

of the Omniscient DEITY — because, not contradicting but surpassing the power of that faculty, by which we can trace them to be Divine — because, finally, we never can satisfy our own minds with the unfounded plea, that the Deity never can nor will claim of his Creatures a belief of the reality of what they are not able to form an adequate conception. —

IF, again, we understand by *Reason*, those common maxims and principles — those general Truths — by the aid of which we arrive at the knowledge and conviction of others; we must own its influence, in the search after Truth, to be very great. —

IN “trying” Revelation, or any particular doctrine, “whether it is of “GOD” — such general principles are supposed to be true: whatever, thus,

occurs, in our scrutiny, inconsistent with these, we are authorised, confidently, to reject for false. One Light cannot be allowed to extinguish another, which is equally the gift of God. — One Truth can never destroy another Truth. But still, after every concession, that ought and must be made, with respect to reason, viewed in this light; since, of itself, it cannot lead us to the knowledge of those essential Truths, it is the province of Revelation to make known; since, strictly speaking, it only decides what we are to reject for false and, by no means, can determine all that is true — or, from reasoning on admitted principles, conduct us to the knowledge of; it appears, in itself, neither the only, nor the sure rule by which we can “try the spirits, whether they are of God.” —

THE

THE only invariable and complete rule , by which we can judge and distinguish between the spirit of Truth and that of error , is , indeed , the Divine Word. According to it , we are assured — “ All Scripture is given of “ GOD , and is profitable for correction “ and instruction in Righteousness.” * — We are not , we ought not , to receive the commandments of men — or place an implicit confidence , in matters of Religion , in the authority of mortals. — No : we have this perfect rule of Divine Truth , which is sanctioned with the awful declaration , “ that “ were an Angel from Heaven to “ preach any other Gospel , than that “ we have received , let him be ac- “ cursed.” † —

THIS

* II. Tim. III. 16.

† Gal. I. 8.

THIS Rule, then, all men are bound, in reason, to embrace. It is laid open to us all, in our mother-tongue, for that very purpose. — Every Christian is alike concerned in it. — Every person may acquire a theoretical conviction of its truth and infallibility; and, hence, become a judge of doctrines, so as “to try them,” aright.

BUT, in the spirit of that Divine System of Knowledge and Faith — the true Christian must know that they, only, can acquire a saving practical knowledge of the Truth, so as to know it in its excellency and power and to be influenced by it, to a holy life and conversation, who are enlightened thereto, by the Divine Spirit of all Truth — after which enlightening it is, surely, the great interest of all, living under the Gospel-dispensation, industriously to enquire and study to gain.

BUT

BUT still, agreeably to the design of the Apostle, — every individual is bound to make a good use of this Rule of Faith and Practice, in “trying the spirits and judging for himself. —

ACCORDINGLY, in Scripture, we are exhorted “to prove all things and “hold fast that which is good * — to “approve the things that are excellent” † — “to search the Scriptures to “see if these things,” — namely, what the very Apostles themselves taught, “were so.” § — In the Revelation of John, it is spoken of, to the praise of the Church at Ephesus, that “she had “tried those who said they were Apostles, and had found them to be “Liars.” † —

TRUE

* I. Thes. V. 21.

† Rom. II. 18. Phil. I. 10.

§ A&A. XVII. 11.

† Rev. II. 2.

TRUE it is, all men are not alike able to follow up the exhortation before us, in the same extent: and the reason of this is, because all men have not the same capacities — the same measure of mental gifts — the same opportunities of improvement — the same progress in knowledge. And this diversity must, necessarily, imply the reasonableness that those who are less capable of judging for themselves, should listen to others as their Teachers and guides. — Nor is this any infraction upon their true liberty of judgment: for to be able to judge on any subject, knowledge, — nay a right knowledge, is implied.

Now, the knowledge of Revelation is not innate; nor is it, at once, imbibed by any supernatural power or gift. We acquire it, as we do every thing else, by learning and study. To learn, therefore, supposes a Teacher — one
ex-

experienced and able to direct to sufficient knowledge to qualify for self-judgment and, in matters in which they cannot be supposed competent judges, to direct their judgment. —

THERE, doubtless, are multitudes unable to judge, whether the Scriptures are faithfully translated from the original text; who, therefore, must rest their judgment on the credit of those experienced and conversant in the original Languages. — So, again, numbers are disqualified to pursue intricate and abstract reasoning, in any controversy of Religion: — they cannot, often, even penetrate into the force of solid argument, less abstruse; and therefore ought not to enter deep into such disputes. — Their great concern should be to hear and believe the Divine Word, which, with respect to those things, most essential and necessary to

to be believed , is sufficiently plain to be conceived ; and , in as far as they are able , to try the evidences , in favour of these Truths , stated by their Teachers ; — while they implore the Direction of GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT to lead and confirm them therein.

SINCE , in knowledge there are Children , the relation of Spiritual Parents is , herein , founded ; which , again , implies the reciprocal duties of that relation , namely , faithfulness , affection and zealous care , on the part of the one ; and deference , respect , modesty and eagerness of learning , on the part of the other. —

ALL , however , are bound , in virtue of their being rational Creatures , to grow in knowledge of Divine Truths and to exert their best care to receive nothing , without trying “ whether it
“ is

" of GOD." So far every one is to judge for himself, that he is to consider no man infallible. — Passive Faith no man nor any Body of men has a right to. — The Word of GOD, only, is infallible; and by this " we are to try the spirits, whether they are of GOD." —

BLESSED be GOD, we have such an infallible Rule for our direction. — By keeping close to this we shall certainly ascertain — nay, in proportion as we advance in the knowledge of it, — shall be rooted and confirmed in the Truth, as it is in CHRIST JESUS. — By studying the sacred Oracles of the living GOD, we shall lay up a good provision of Divine Truths, so that " the Word of CHRIST may dwell richly in us:" * we shall delight to dwell there.

* Col. III. 16.

thereon — to hear them, unweariedly, repeated — and shall be prepared, on hearing “of false prophets being gone out into the world” — or any particular doctrine being started, to call them to trial by this universal standard of sacred Truth — “to the Law and to the Testimony; if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them.”

SUCH, my Brethren! is the nature and extent of the important duty to which we are exhorted in the text. —

I proceed, now, to what was proposed in the —

THIRD PLACE — namely, to subjoin a few practical reflections on what has been said.

MUCH,

Much, indeed, might be said, by way of practical improvement of the momentous subject; but since I have endeavoured to contrive all that has been said, a solemn appeal to the understanding of professing Christians, in favour of what is of universal concernment, I trust, it will be found the less necessary to multiply words in applying it. —

LET us hear the sum of the whole!

It is

I. "BELOVED," believe not every
"spirit." —

Now, the necessity and reasonableness of this much, has been pointed out. Believe not, then, any man, nor follow him further, than he is a follower of CHRIST. — Assert your Christian Liberty here with firmness; yet

yet, with modesty and moderation. Guard against suffering your judgment to be biassed by any prejudices, whether popular, domestic or personal; that are ever obstacles to our being open for the reception and defence of the Truth. —

BUT to proceed herein, with safety, you must advert, in the

2^d PLACE, to the necessity of studying the Scriptures, in order to qualify you to give, hence, a rational “account of the faith that is in you.” —

THIS much is clearly presupposed in the duty we have been considering. — To disbelieve the Spirits and try them, we must proceed upon some just and reasonable grounds. And these grounds can only be our knowledge and conviction of true Religion, comprised in the

the sacred Oracles of the Living
G O D. —

A profession of any Religion, without understanding the grounds of it, is vague, idle and unmeaning. No stability can be expected in such profession. Those of this character, “when perilous days may come for the Truth’s sake, are soon offended:” — when errors abound, they are easily led away with the popular prejudice of the times. —

LET us, then, O Christians! who have a true Religion — each according to his capacity — all with the best industry of endeavour, labour to have the true knowledge of it! — The more, indeed, we understand it, the more we shall be confirmed in it; and the less in danger of being misled by false prophets and false teachers: nay the more we shall consult our best

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in

interests, by having our minds certified with respect to those fundamental doctrinal Truths, without which we can have no comfort in life and death. — And, especially ought we to be the more ready and willing to cultivate this rational knowledge, having, as I shall distinctly remind you, in the

3^d PLACE, the assurance “that
“false prophets are gone out
“into the world.” —

THESE, you have heard, have always existed. And where any room for surprize they should now? —

SPEAKING of false prophets, I took occasion, in the entrance on this subject, to mention a most extraordinary book; a few years ago, imposed upon the world, in a neighbouring Kingdom; —

I mean the *Prophecies of a Richard Brothers* *

I N mentioning this book, think not it was my intention to try its claim to
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* This extraordinary book was sent me, a few months after its publication, by a Friend, whom I had instructed in the Christian faith, some years before and, who, having but one printed Copy, was at the trouble to transcribe it, in order to have my sentiment of it. According to his manuscript copy it was printed, *London, in the year of Christ 1794; and entitled A revealed knowledge of the prophecies and times, the present war and the prophecy now fulfilling; the year of the world 5913. — The second book, we are told Contains with other great and remarkable things, not revealed to any other person on earth, the sudden and perpetual fall of the Turkish, German and Russian Empires — under the Direction of the Lord God, and published by his sacred command; it being a second sign of warning, for the benefit of all Nations: By the Man that will be revealed to the Hebrews, as their Prince and Prophet.*

Inspiration. I wish not to tire your patience with such unnecessary discussion. All I shall say of it is, that little knowledge of the Divine Word is wanting to convince every one, that it

I mention this circumstance, merely to account for my taking notice of the strange publication: from which little is to be dreaded, with respect to revealed Religion. It merits not the regular confutation of a sensible mind; and *time*, in the non-fulfillment of the pretended prophecies, has abundantly proved the whole to be an imposture: charity makes me speak of it in the light of deranged intellects. —

If any answer to such wild productions of a distempered imagination was wanting, TRUE REVELATION has given it Deut. XIII. 1—6. — Ch. XVIII. 22.

I must, in justice to my friend, now in life, add that our correspondence, on the subject, was very short and his conviction of Revealed Religion, agreeably to its true state, confirmed.

it is , what the short interval of its publication has abundantly proved it to be , a gross delusion. It contains assertions without any rational evidence. It adduces texts which in a most arbitrary and unjust manner are disfigured and , in their propheticall allusion , shockingly misapplied from their proper object , the true Redeemer , the Lord JESUS CRIST, — It explains away the restoration of the Jews , at a limited period ; for which , with many other stories , there is no authority. But , the fact is , whoever impartially tries the spirit of that man , by Scripture , will be in no danger of falling into the delusion : while the more acute will be able to collect , that propheticall Visions and Revelations are , now , not to be expected , because unnecessary — because the internal Operations of the Divine Spirit , we are taught to believe , under the bright sun-shine of the Gospel,

day, are more glorious in bringing the Church to its promised maturity and more consistent with the plan of Grace God has made known. —

WITH weak minds — and weak, indeed, they were — it found reception for a season. —

BUT much fear of danger this way, in an age of so much incredulity as we live in, we have not. Nor was it from any such apprehensions, I mentioned the wild production of deranged intellects, — on this account, scarcely sufferable to be stated to the sensible mind. —

NO: but I mention it, on account of its influence, another way, truly pernicious. Infidels and Deists take, hence, an unjustifiable liberty to ridicule all true Religion, as did it connive

at

at such wild extravagancies of a distempered imagination. — Those, who are accustomed to judge of matters in religion, according to the prevailing taste and not according to the Word of God, are too apt, hence, to confirm themselves in irreligion and encourage universal doubting. —

IN all this, we sadly discover the ruins of our fallen Nature. We mark our corruption and imperfection. We need no longer seek evidences of what is here realised in active conduct, namely of the insufficiency of Reason, in itself, to direct us to happiness, of course to essential Truth and enable us to rise above those ruins of misery, Scripture and, thus, experience prove we, by Nature, ly in. — But in all this, we behold an affecting warning to guard against every dangerous extreme. —

AND how ? Only by dilligently
 “ trying all such spirits , whether they
 “ are of GOD ; ” by studying the Scrip-
 tures and hearing what the GOD of
 Truth saith.

THE danger of Infidelity you will
 have collected from what has been said.
 For that very reason I interspersed hints
 on its unreasonableness and folly. —
 The end will convince many of their
 great error here and open their under-
 standing to the full belief of those sa-
 cred Truths they made light of , with
 a shocking impiety and hardness of
 heart. —

MANY — alas ! — never more so
 than in our days — seem to be given
 up to a spirit of blindness and incorrigi-
 bility with respect to true Religion. —
 This charge is no longer subject to the
 hackneyed criticism of having always
 been

been the subject of pulpit-declamation, in former times. — I may say of it, as was said, of old, with respect to the obstinacy of the Jews, it appears “with a high hand and a stiff neck.” —

IT is discernible among every rank and order of mankind. An indifference takes place — nay seems to be daily gathering strength, — which portends the final desertion of every religious principle. —

WHEN facts speak to the senses of mankind, equivocation, that may be in words, is not to be dreaded. These effectually silence those declaimers, who are continually crying up the moral and religious state of Society to be equally good *now* it was in past ages; not to speak of its being more enlightened,

which, with respect to *true* RELIGION, it certainly is not.

O Christians ! let me speak freely to you ; nor , as St. Paul , once said , “ account me your enemy for speaking the Truth.” * I wish to appeal to common sense and involve you into no intricate argument in the cause of Religion. —

WHERE a form of true Religion is assumed — let me ask — have we nothing to dread — no spirits to try ? — Independent of the avowed Deist disclaiming all Divine Revelation , have we no false Teachers , from whom much is to be dreaded ? — Or rather say , is it to be denied , many by word and writings endeavour to spread disbelief of the most sacred Truths , fundamental of
our

* Gal. IV. 16.

our holy Faith, and thus aim at the very vitals of Christianity? — In removing, for instance, the doctrine of free grace and spiritual strength, through a REDEEMER and ascribing to fallen man powers, which experience must convince us he does not, naturally, possess; the best of Religions is converted into a system of impracticable morality, because, through the corruption that is in us, wanting both the power of ourselves to live up to it and the principle upon which such can be observed, which, we are assured, is a true saving Faith in GOD and his DIVINE SON.

BUT, in general, it behoves us seriously to enquire, how this Religion of the Divine JESUS — the Religion of our Fathers — the Religion of absolute Truth — confirmed by so great evidence, that determined prejudice, aided by all
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the force of corrupt nature , can only resist — is , *now* , even *externally* countenanced , by the greater multitude. —

ABSTRACTED from the Care of the STATE , in its true REFORMED explanation , which , with regard to its external maintenance it formerly enjoyed , but , in relation to its internal evidence of Truth , standing in no need of the sanction of human - Power and Legislative Authority — being sufficient thereto in itself ; it might have been expected , it would have become the additional care of sincere professors of it and dictated a concern , that would demonstrate itself , in an anxious desire not to rest , untill some provision at least was made for its maintenance , in external appearance. —

BUT how little is this concern to be seen with the growing many , securely
perse-

persevering in the partial or total neglect of the great Bulwark of Religion, I mean the LORDS DAY and his sacred ORDINANCES?

THE great duty of solemn worship, no one who has any just notion of the Deity and the natural obligation of Creatures can be supposed capable of disavowing. Nor do you disavow this in words. — The august precept, prescribing and regulating it, you pretend to acknowledge. But, if ever neglect of this claimed general notice and regret it is peculiarly now. The obligation “to keep holy the Christian Sabbath” seems no more to be felt; but to be expunged from the series of duties, proposed by self, as being sufficient to satisfy the Creator. The Instituted Ordinances of GOD, of course, are, optionally, dispensed with and, with the Day, sunk into the mass of unsanc-

sanctified days, deemed of lesser account. —

THE evil here receives an additional malignity, from such neglect of the Day, being represented as a Christian Liberty. But such a plea “we are to try whether it be of God?” — And if a positive Law can satisfy us, we shall be in no doubt respecting our duty. —

IN regard of the general observance of the Day and Divine Ordinances, we are left to regret, the contagion is daily spreading and discovering its envenomed evil, in begetting indifference and coolness, in the minds of others, gradually tending to incur the fullest measure of the guilt. It affords, indeed, a sad prospect with respect to the Cause of true Religion, in general, in the world, to behold, even
with

with the better thinking, often, a formality that obstructs their receiving any real benefit from the Ordinances. —

THE grand precept, I mean that before us, of the LORD'S DAY, which secures the observance of every other of Religion, being enervated, the transition to every species of immorality and wickedness, — the ruin of a people, — becomes easy. — For, the same principle that authorises disobedience to one command is equally powerfull and will stimulate, naturally, to a like disregard to every other, when worldly interest, or a depraved heart may propose the violation as being eligible. —

INDEED, every constraint upon corrupt nature being hence removed, a free scope, is given for its grosser out-breakings which strike at the foundation of

of all private, social, domestic and public happiness.

Y E S , O Christians ! it is the true fear of the Almighty that is only able to counteract these. Take away the force of his threatnings and of the allurements of his mercy ; and the energy of human Laws — most dreaded — is enervated and defeated. —

AND where, then, room for wonder at those immoralities, those vices and evils abounding among us, that are the very bane of private or public prosperity ? —

FOR so much growing degeneracy, let us, who feel it, learn cordial prayer ! They will not hear nor believe that their souls may live : But let us pray for them : Let us commend them to the Spirit of all grace, who only can
work

work a change of heart and disposition and recover them to the saving belief of the Divine Word. —

FINALLY, Brethren, those of you, I would address, in the

4th PLACE — who, in “trying the
“spirits, whether they are of
“GOD,” are convinced of the
Divine Word being the infal-
libile rule; and are studious to
promote your knowledge in Divine
Things. —

YOU, in particular, who might have
joined, in the insinuations, made in the
entrance on this subject, relative to
your having been at the LORD'S Table
and there sanctioned your belief of the
Truth as it is in CHRIST JESUS —

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I would briefly address : Continue your laudable search after knowledge in sacred concerns — to become more and more rooted in the principles of your Holy Faith , whereby ye may stand unshaken amidst the multiplicity of errors received in the great business of Religion. —

“ HOLD fast the profession of your
 “ Faith without wavering ; * and be
 “ not like children , tossed to and fro
 “ and carried about with every wind
 “ of doctrine , through the slight of
 “ men and the cunning craftiness of
 “ those who ly in wait to de-
 “ ceive.” — †

“ HOLD

* Heb. X. 23.

† Eph. IV. 14.

"HOLD fast the form of sound
"words ye have received" * — in which
your Fore - Fathers died — which some
of them sealed with their blood. —

BUT even this is not enough. —
What can all this , even , signify , if
you feel not the power of the truth ?
— If ye know the truth , study to do
it. — If ye believe , strive to act up
to your belief. — Pray for the grace
of GOD'S SPIRIT "to strengthen you
"in the inward man of the heart , to
"do the Divine Will in all things". —
Pray that ye may not "be led into
"temptation." — Pray that ye may be
made "steadfast and unmoveable ever
"abounding in the work of the
LORD." —

FI.

* II. Tim. I. 13.

FINALLY, pray for all who err from the Truth, as it is in CHRIST JESUS. — Commend them to GOD and to his recovering grace. — Be charitably affectioned towards them. — Convince them by a holy life of the power and beauty of internal Religion of the heart — that it is “the Grace of GOD, which has appeared unto you, bringing salvation — that has taught you to deny ungodliness and to live, soberly, righteously and godly in the present world.” — *

ENCOURAGE yourselves in such a wise religious conduct with the assurance that if ye persevere ye shall be saved — that the same promise, made in the Revelation, to the Church of Phi.

* Titus II. 11, 12.

Philadelphia, belongs also to you —
 namely “ Because ye have kept my
 “ Word and have not denied my
 “ Name * — because ye have kept the
 “ word of my patience ; I also, saith
 “ the LORD, will keep you from the
 “ hour of temptation, which cometh
 “ upon all the world to try them that
 “ dwell upon the earth.” †

REMEMBER the unalterable Word
 of GOD is pledged that, amidst the
 very wreck of Nature, “ it shall be well
 “ with the righteous ;” § — and hence,
 “ tarry the LORD’s good leizure” —
 in an active zeal for his honour and
 glory, in the whole compass of your
 Chris-

* Rev. III. 8.

† Rev. III. 10.

§ Is. III. 10.

Christian duty : — that when his good
time cometh , you may be found
ready and prepared to enter upon that
everlasting “ rest which remaineth for
“ the people of God.” *

* Heb. IV. 9.

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